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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE Radio Service OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Saturday, July 17, 1937.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Department of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Our Department of Agriculture correspondent writes this week news of the campaign to save the American elm tree from the deadly Dutch elm disease which has practically wiped out the elm trees in Europe.

"On a hot summer day like this," she says, "nothing seems more grateful than the refreshing coolness of a fine shade tree. And when I write the word 'shade tree,' I naturally think first of the elm which so many people consider the most valuable and beautiful shade tree in this country. And I think, too, of course, of the fight Government scientists are now carrying on to save our elms from the plague that threatens them.

"Though the Dutch elm disease is still centered mainly in an area around New York City which includes parts of Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York State, it still is endangering the 25 million elms in all parts of the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast. Our elms, according to estimates by foresters, are worth some 660 million dollars to the country. The principal commercial elm-stands are in the lower Mississippi Valley and the Lakes region. Elms are perhaps most valued as ornamental and shade trees in New England where so many towns owe much of their beauty to elm-shaded streets. Then recently millions of elms have been grown for planting in the drought-stricken areas of the West.

"Shortly after the War people in Europe began to worry about a mysterious wilting and dying of elms all over France, Belgium, and Holland. In 1919 scientists over there discovered that a fungus was responsible, a fungus that cut off the circulation of sap in the tree. It was spread by small beetles that laid their eggs in shallow tunnels beneath the bark, ate the inner bark, and as they flew from tree to tree carried the spores of the disease with them. Scientists found no cure for the disease. The only known method of control was to destroy all elms that might be a source of infection. But by the time they learned this in Europe, the disease had spread too far for control. Mr. R. Kent Beattie of the Department of Agriculture, who recently returned from studying the disease in Europe, says that he found dead and dying elms everywhere. The beautiful elms that once arched the avenues at Versailles in France are gone, or riddled by the disease. And the elm rows leading to Windsor Castle in England are beginning to go the same way.

"Between 1925 and 1933 the disease came into this country on burl elm logs shipped from Europe to cabinet makers in the United States. (We now have laws against importing such wood.) A few isolated diseased trees have appeared in Maryland, Virginia, Indiana, and Ohio. Prompt action by the scientists in locating and destroying these trees seems to have checked the spread in these areas. But around the port of New York where many of the elm logs came into the

country, 22 thousand trees have already caught the plague. So this is now the center where the scientists are working hard to wipe out the disease.

"You will be interested to know how they are going about it. First, they are trying to locate and remove every stricken elm as soon as possible after the first symptoms of the disease show up in June and July. The symptoms are yellowing and wilting leaves and dying branches. They are also trying to remove all elms dead or dying from any cause since dead and dying elm breeds and harbors the beetles that carry the disease. And they are going through swamps and woods and destroying wild elms which have no value but may catch and spread the disease. This is a big program for it covers 48 hundred square miles in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey beside a 27 hundred square mile protective zone around this area. The scientists are also keeping an eye on some 16 outside districts -- mostly ports and mid-western cities where the diseased European elm logs were handled, and 12 thousand miles of railroad over which the logs traveled.

"Four autogiros are taking part in the campaign and about 1500 scouts, including many members of CCC in camps in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Maryland. These scouts attend training classes to learn to recognize the symptoms of the disease, record their observation, make and use maps, climb trees, and collect samples. The autogiros carry trained observers over inaccessible areas and railroad lines. Flying slowly just above the tree tops the observers spot the symptoms of the disease on the foliage below and then mark the location of suspected trees on their maps. Ground crews use these maps to guide them to the sick trees.

"One of the big problems in the campaign has been to cut down and burn sick trees fast enough to prevent the spread of the disease. But this year the scientists are using a new method of killing infected trees in such a way that they will not endanger healthy trees. This labor-saving process is called silvicide. The scientists put copper sulphate in the sap stream which soon kills the tree and makes it immune to the disease.

"Three years ago many scientists were in grave doubt as to whether the disease could be wiped out and American elm trees saved. The picture is more hopeful today because they have already made so much progress. They now believe that if they can continue the present campaign a few years more, they can drive this dread disease entirely out of the country."

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